The Jihad Against the Jews

Martin Kramer

ON JULY 18, a ferocious bomb explosion ripped through the seven-story building at 633 Pasteur Street, in the traditionally Jewish quarter of Buenos Aires. The building completely collapsed, and the final death count reached 95 persons. It was Argentina's worst terrorist attack.

In many ways this strike resembled the bombing of the Israeli embassy in Buenos Aires in March 1992, which left 29 people dead. That earlier bombing immediately followed Israel's assassination in south Lebanon of the secretary-general of Hezbollah, the Iranian-backed Shiite "Party of God." Islamic Jihad, Hezbollah's clandestine branch, made a convincing claim of responsibility for the embassy bombing, although the Argentine authorities never picked up its trail.

The attack in July, as the chief U.S. counterterrorism official later put it, also had "the hallmarks of a Hezbollah operation." It likewise seemed to be an act of revenge, perhaps for an accumulation of grievances: the massacre of Muslim worshippers in Hebron's mosque by an Israeli settler; or Israel's June raid on a Hezbollah base deep in Lebanon's Bekaa Valley, which killed nearly 30 trainees.

The technique of the massive car bomb, so reminiscent of Beirut, was also identical in both instances, and pointed in the direction of Muslim extremists generally, and Hezbollah in particular. While Argentina has over 30 neo-Nazi and far-Right movements, which presumably would wish Israel and the Jews harm, the quantity of explosives and the method of delivery guaranteed that the dying would be indiscriminate. Indeed, nearly a third of those killed were non-Jewish passersby. Resort to such a technique required not only a determination to destroy the target, but a total lack of regard for the inevitable "collateral damage." It seemed probable that only complete outsiders would be willing to kill Argentines so randomly in order to get at their target.

Yet for all their similarities, this latest bombing differed in a crucial respect from its predecessor: it was directed not at Israelis but at Jews as such. No Israeli agencies operated from the building on Pasteur Street. The devastated structure housed the Asociación Mutual Israelita Argentina (AMIA), the main organizational body of the Buenos Aires Jewish Community, which had just marked its centennial; and the Delegación de Asociaciones Israelitas Argentinas (DAIA), the organizational umbrella of Argentine Jewry, established over 60 years ago. The building included everything from social-aid offices, where the elderly collected pensions, to the archives of AMIA and the records of the city's *hevra kedisha*, its burial society.

The choice of a Jewish target was no mistake. It came as the culmination of a shift in the thinking of many Muslim fundamentalists. Today they are in thrall to the idea that Jews everywhere, in league with Israel, are behind a sinister plot to destroy Islam. The battleground is anywhere Jews are organized to assist and aid in this plot.

This is a new concept even for Islamic fundamentalism, and it represents an especially virulent form of anti-Semitism, one so widespread and potentially violent that it could eclipse all other forms of anti-Semitism over the next decade.

RELIGIOUS prejudice always colored the traditional Islamic view of the Jews, but it also affected Muslim attitudes to Christians and all other nonbelievers. Most importantly, Muslims did not consider Jews a race apart. They regarded Jews as forming a community of belief—an errant belief, to be sure, but one entitled to a large measure of toleration.

Modern anti-Semitism in Muslim lands dates only from about the beginning of this century, following the spread of European racial theories. The idea of the Jews as a band of conspirators came to Muslim lands largely through the translation of anti-Semitic texts into Arabic, and above all *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*. Europe's anti-Semitism, like its nationalism, had an immense impact on Muslim thinking, persuading many Muslims that the Jews did constitute a distinct race, whose members had always been treacherous in all places and at all times, because it was in their fundamental nature to be so.

Not surprisingly, European-inspired racial anti-Semitism reached the height of its influence with the genocidal Nazi war against the Jews. In the 1930's and 1940's, Arab-nationalist leaders found

MARTIN KRAMER is the associate director of the Moshe Dayan Center for Middle Eastern Studies at Tel Aviv University, and the Aaron and Cecile Goldman Visiting Israeli Professor at Georgetown University.

support and then refuge in Berlin, and Arabic translations of *Mein Kampf* and the *Protocols* enjoyed their widest circulation.

These ideas persisted into the postwar period, when Jews were forced from Arab lands. Despite their deep roots in these lands, Arab nationalist dogma drew on the anti-Semitic doctrines of Europe to portray the Jews as aliens in every place, at every time. The Arab nationalists claimed that the hearts and minds of all Jews belonged ultimately to the new state of Israel, and so any Jew could be held accountable for the supposed sins of the Jewish state. This provided the legitimation for the mass expulsion of Jews from Arab lands in the 1950's. There were once 800,000 Jews in the Arab world; today there are only about 20,000, most of them in Morocco.

Arab anti-Semitism took on a new guise in the 1960's and 1970's, under the impact of the fashionable anti-Zionism of the Left. While denying any anti-Semitic prejudice, the new "anti-Zionists" also denied Jews the right to self-definition as a nation. The Jews had wronged all mankind by deciding that they constituted a nation, and then by creating Israel in the heartland of another nation.

It followed that the only solution to the Jewish problem was denationalization, to be achieved by the defeat and dismantlement of the state of Israel and the return of the Jews whence they came. It was an idea that dovetailed nicely with the growing influence of Soviet and New Left anti-Zionism, and reached its apex with the "Zionism is racism" resolution of the UN General Assembly.

Throughout these many changing fads of Arab anti-Semitism, however, an earlier generation of Muslim fundamentalists still adhered to a strict reading of the Islamic tradition. Their attitude to the Jews rested not upon the imported European doctrines of race and nation, which they rejected, but upon religion. As careful readers of their own texts, they knew that the Qu'ran faulted the Jews of Muhammad's time for failing to recognize his prophethood. But they did not understand this as a lesson on the character of Jews in all times and places.

Nor did these more traditional fundamentalists hold the Jews to be a conspiratorial race, or subscribe to any of the various solutions, from expulsion to extermination, held out by European example. In their view, Islam provided the perfect solution to the Jewish problem: the creation of an Islamic state, which would accord Jews the status of an autonomous, protected religious community. Their model was the *dhimma*, the covenant of submission and protection offered to Jews and Christians during the first Islamic conquests.

This view still allowed for a distinction between Judaism and Zionism and, by extension, between Jews and Israelis. An example of fundamentalist rigor on this point could be found in the thought of the late Ismail Faruqi of Temple University in Philadelphia, a Palestinian fundamentalist of the old school. Faruqi regarded anti-Semitism as one more European disease which Muslims had caught by sleeping with the West, and which a return to true Islam would eradicate. "There cannot be any doubt that the Jew is a sufferer of injustice at the hands of the Christian West," admitted Faruqi, rejecting the idea that the Jews were everywhere evil and deserving of retribution. As Faruqi saw it, "Islam offers a perfect solution to the Jewish problem which has beset the Jews and the West for two millennia," since it would allow Jews complete communal and religious autonomy, and the right to reside anywhere in the ideal Islamic state.

Of course, Faruqi went on to add a crucial punch line: "The Islamic position leaves no chance for the Zionist state but to be dismantled and destroyed, and its wealth confiscated to pay off its liabilities." But Faruqi never would have conceived of the conflict with Israel as entailing a global struggle between Islam and Judaism.

FARUQI'S idea that "the relation of Islam to Judaism is one of sympathy, even identity" would appall the new generation of Muslim fundamentalists who have emerged since the 1980's. Many of them have been thoroughly imbued with imported doctrines of anti-Semitism. Some are born-again Muslims, ill-acquainted with Islamic tradition, who often see Islam only as an ideology of power.

These new fundamentalists deemphasize the long history of Islamic tolerance of the Jews across centuries and continents, fixating instead upon the early conflict between Muhammad and the Jewish tribes of 7th-century Arabia. The Jews who clashed with Muhammad are presented as archetypes of a universal Jew, treacherous by nature, whose perfidy threatens not only Islam but all humanity.

In this discourse, which purports to be the authentic voice of Islam, all manner of themes and sources intermingle. Verses from the Qu'ran abut quotations from the *Protocols*. The role of the Jews in Arabia of the 7th century is compared with the alleged international power of the Jews in the late 20th. And in this collapsing of sources and history, another distinction—between anti-Zionism and anti-Judaism—is lost. The fundamentalist arguments mobilized against the state of Israel are invariably arguments against the Jews in general.

In short, the Islamic fundamentalist position has now been thoroughly penetrated by classic European anti-Semitism. This has been facilitated by the fact that so many fundamentalist thinkers of the present generation have spent time in the West, collecting advanced degrees at the universities of London and Paris. There they internalized

the anti-Semitism of the extreme Left and Right, and they now retail a comprehensive indictment of the Jews which goes far beyond anti-Zionism. Their tales of unbridled Jewish power enjoy even more credibility among their listeners at home, since they can claim to have seen and experienced it firsthand. They wax persuasive when they declare that an international Jewish conspiracy stands behind Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses*, or the fall of the Muslim-owned Bank of Credit and Commerce International (BCCI).

Consider the spiritual mentor of Hezbollah in Lebanon, Sayyid Muhammad Husayn Fadlallah, whose teeming flock overflows into Beirut's streets to hear his mosque sermon each Friday. According to Fadlallah, "The struggle against the Jewish state, in which the Muslims are engaged, is a continuation of the old struggle of the Muslims against the Jews' conspiracy against Islam." Muslims now face

> a world Jewish movement working to deprive Islam of its positions of actual power—spiritually, on the question of Jerusalem; geographically, on the question of Palestine; politically, by bringing pressures to block Islam's movement at more than one place; and economically, in an effort to control Islam's economic potential and resources, in production and consumption.

Fadlallah thus rejects the argument, which is still made by some nationalists and fundamentalists, that Israel is but an instrument of American imperialism. "The Jews want to be a world superpower. . . . No one should imagine that the Jews act on behalf of any super or minor power. It is their personality to make for themselves a future world presence." The very purpose of Israel is to bring "all the Jews in the world to this region, to make it the nucleus for spreading their economic and cultural domination."

For Fadlallah, then, Israel is "not merely a group that established a state at the expense of a people. It is a group which wants to establish Jewish culture at the expense of Islamic culture." Here is a view of Muslims and Jews locked in a timeless and total confrontation, until one completely subjugates the other.

Along with this notion has come the idea that Jews everywhere are Israel's co-conspirators in a plot against Islam. A leading protagonist of this idea is Rashid al-Ghannushi, the exiled leader of al-Nahda, the banned Tunisian fundamentalist movement.

Last year, Ghannushi was granted political asylum in Britain, and he is now the foremost fundamentalist ideologue in the West. From the belly of the beast, he has contended that the Jews everywhere are behind a worldwide campaign against Islam. Islam and the West could reach an accommodation, he says, were it not for the worldwide machinations of the Jews, who fan the fires of mistrust. Beware the Jews, he admonishes the West: "We Islamists hope that the West is not carried away by the Jewish strategy of linking the future of its relationship with the Islamic world with a war against Islam."

THE recent agreement between Israel and the PLO, and Israel's continuing negotiations with Arab states, have, if anything, exacerbated fundamentalist anti-Semitism. Opposed to any negotiated agreement, the fundamentalists now seek to frighten Islamic opinion by warning that peace will subject the Muslim world to complete Jewish domination.

Since the expulsion of the Jews from the Arab world over a generation ago, domestic Jewish influence has not been a major issue, either for nationalists or fundamentalists. But now the fundamentalists are declaring that the "normalization" provisions of any peace treaty will mean a massive influx of Jews into Arab countries—as diplomats, journalists, businessmen, and tourists. Their objective, say the fundamentalists, will be to dominate and corrupt the Islamic world.

This is the line now being taken by the leading spokesman of the Palestinian Hamas, Ibrahim Ghawshah, who resides in Jordan. Ghawshah subscribes to the concept that the conflict with the Jews is not over territory but truth, and is therefore eternal: "We think the conflict between the Arabs and Jews, between the Muslims and the Jews, is a cultural conflict that will continue to rage throughout all time." With peace, he warns, the Jews will gain the upper hand in that conflict; the return of Arab territory is a clever Jewish ruse, which will allow Israel to extend its hegemony over the entire region. Israel's economic resources, he reminds Muslims,

> are extremely advanced technologically and scientifically. God forbid, if by means of signing the peace accords the Arabs and Israelis reach a compromise and they implement their plan for autonomy. Arab economies will collapse because they will not be able to compete with the Israelis' modern industries. Thus, Israel will dominate the region as Japan dominates Southeast Asia, and the Arabs will all become employees of the Jews.

The image of the Jew is thus transformed, from a ruthless enemy on the battlefield to a ruthless boss on the factory floor. In the same spirit, Ghannushi has called the Israel-PLO accord "a Jewish-American plan encompassing the entire region, which would cleanse it of all resistance and open it to Jewish economic and cultural activity, culminating in complete Jewish hegemony from Marrakesh to Kazakhstan."

This Jewish hegemony would extend even into Arabia, to the sacred precincts of Islam, from which Muhammad expelled the Jews. "The Jews are planning to return to Khaybar," warns Ghawshah, referring to the town near Medina which was the largest Jewish settlement in Arabia

at the time of Muhammad, and against which Muhammad waged war. "Actually, by this accord, they will go there. They will go back peacefully. They will ask for the houses of their grandfathers."

From the fundamentalist vantage point, this scenario of Jews penetrating their world, demanding a return even to Arabia, is the nightmarish prelude to the ultimate eradication of Islam by its most intractable enemy.

And so fundamentalists must now proceed to the task of portraying the Jews in their true light. Hezbollah's Fadlallah takes for granted that agreements will be reached between Israel and weak Arab governments. Their implementation therefore must be combated at the popular level. And Fadlallah points to the source from which Muslims can draw inspiration:

> In the vocabulary of the Qu'ran, Islamists have much of what they need to awaken the consciousness of Muslims, relying on the literal text of the Qu'ran, because the Qu'ran speaks about the Jews in a negative way, concerning both their historical conduct and future schemes.

THIS species of anti-Semitism is intended by its creators to amplify a genuine apprehension. As more accords are reached, Jews are appearing in Arab countries either where they were never present, or where they disappeared over a millennium ago, or whence they fled a generation ago. Fear of subjugation runs deep in Arab societies, and it will not be surprising if this shrill anti-Semitism gains a widespread hearing.

But the invigorated anti-Semitism of Muslim fundamentalists is a threat not only in the Middle East. Muslim immigrants and visitors have arrived in ever greater numbers to the West, in countries where Jews are long established: Britain, France, the U.S., Argentina, and Australia. Today virtually every trend in Islamic thought and activism is represented in the Americas and Europe, including the most militant forms of extremism. Britain, for example, is home to organizations of Iran's supporters, especially around the so-called "Muslim Parliament"; to the Palestinian Hamas, which publishes its flagship magazine in London; and to the Hizb al-Tahrir, or "Liberation Party," clandestine in the Middle East but highly visible on British campuses. This is the kind of volatile mix one would be hard-pressed to find in any single Middle Eastern country.

In recent years, the Jews have not been at the top of the agenda of Muslim fundamentalists in the West, who have been much more preoccupied with two other objectives. First, they have tried to purge Muslim ranks of "deviants," to create an atmosphere of intellectual intimidation so that only their ideas can be safely aired. This was the portent of the Rushdie affair in Britain. Second, they have tried, often through violence, to compel Western governments to abandon support for secular, pro-Western regimes in the Islamic world. This was the apparent motive behind the World Trade Center bombing. Until now, the Jews have been marginal to the quest for purity and power; and until Buenos Aires, Jews as such had not been singled out for death threats or bomb attacks.

But the progress of the Arab-Israeli peace process has altered fundamentalist priorities. If the peace process cannot be stopped on Middle Eastern ground, then perhaps its momentum can be checked by a counteroffensive on foreign ground. And for those fundamentalists who have thoroughly refined their theory of a world Jewish conspiracy against Islam, a Jewish target will do as well as an Israeli one. Indeed, the message of Buenos Aires is that Jewish targets, because they are so numerous and indefensible, might even be preferred under certain circumstances.

The upshot is that all of Jewry is held hostage against the conduct of Israel. The choice probably fell first on Argentina because it has no effective investigative apparatus of its own—a weakness demonstrated by its failure to solve the Israeli embassy bombing of 1992. But a similar strike could be delivered just as readily in any other country. The infrastructure is already in place.*

FORTUNATELY, against this temptation to strike soft Jewish targets, there are also ideological and practical constraints. On one plane, the distinction between Israel and the Jewish Diaspora is vital to fundamentalists. Here is the secretary-general of Hezbollah, Sayyid Hasan Nasrallah, in an interview last year:

> I wish to send a message to all the Jews who came to Palestine. I want to tell them that their ambitions, dreams, and aggression can never provide them with the security, stability, and regional power they want. If they truly want security, peace, and stability, they must return from where they came. I believe the climate in Paris is better than in Palestine. Let them return to Paris, London, Australia, from wherever they were before.

Yet now, by threatening all of world Jewry, Islam's fundamentalists have contradicted this logic, strengthening the perception that it is the Jews of Israel who are the most secure of all.

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* The subsequent bombings in London, of the Israeli embassy (July 26) and of a building housing Jewish social services (July 27), seemed inconsistent with the known techniques of fundamentalists. The embassy car bomb was delivered by a woman driver, while the strike at the community building occurred at night, when the building was empty. Fundamentalist terror groups have not employed women before, and usually do not strike targets simply to demonstrate their capabilities. These bombings may have been the work of secular radicals, who wished to prove after Buenos Aires that the field did not belong only to fundamentalists. No one died in either attack, and there have been no arrests.

Moreover, when Israel's Jews do "return," it is from a position of strength—in the tragic case of Buenos Aires, not only to help dig bodies out of the rubble, but also to assist the Argentine government in its investigation. An international *carte blanche* for the Mossad is a risk not all fundamentalists are prepared to run.

Such attacks also corrode the moral underpinnings of the fundamentalists themselves. *Jihad* is a moral code of warfare, regulated by provisions of Islamic law. As adherents of that law, many fundamentalists know that such attacks stretch it too far. Hence the silence among Hezbollah's clerics over the bombing, and the statement by one of them that, because the bombing killed women and children, "this act cannot be the work of those who are committed to Islam."

True, Hezbollah has abducted and bombed innocents of various nationalities many times before. But those acts have always created a measure of internal discord between hard-nosed operatives and the guardians of the law. This is something Hezbollah usually seeks to avoid, and may serve as a brake on any rapid descent into all-out terror against Jewish targets worldwide.

More practically, Muslim fundamentalists are discovering again that attacks against Jews as such yield no benefits and provide no relief from Israel's military strikes. This is a repeat lesson, since a decade ago, Hezbollah gained nothing from holding another Jewish community hostage against Israel's conduct.

Thus, in 1984 and 1985, a group operating under the wing of Hezbollah and calling itself the "Organization of the Oppressed of the Earth" abducted one in every ten of the remaining 100 Jews in Lebanon, hoping to force the release of Shiites detained by an Israel-backed militia in south Lebanon. Hezbollah accused its Jewish hostages of espionage: "We did not take these people because they are Jewish." The charge was dismissed even by Lebanese Shiites, most notably in the case of Elie Hallak, the "doctor of the poor," who had ministered largely to Shiites in the Ein-el-Mreisse quarter of West Beirut.

In 1985, Hezbollah began to murder its Jewish hostages, ultimately killing all of them, including Dr. Hallak, in retaliation for Israeli strikes in south Lebanon. But Israel did not negotiate for their release. Nor did it retaliate for their murder.

Israel's policy, then and now, remains one of no negotiation over Jewish hostages. It will not drop its own defense if enemies threaten Jews elsewhere. Nor is it obliged to retaliate when Jews elsewhere are struck. And so, although Israel extended a hand to the dazed Jewish community of Buenos Aires, it did not take any retaliatory action in Lebanon for the bombing. On the other hand, Israel still retaliates against every rocket fired in its own direction by Hezbollah, and can be expected to do so in the future.

Israel's policy has been to signal that when Hezbollah attacks Israelis, Israel will invariably respond. But when it attacks Jews elsewhere, it must reckon not with Israel, but with the world. Today, many fundamentalist movements seek political legitimacy in the eyes of the world as they pursue power at home. If attacks on Jews fail to move Israel, but do move the world against them, their calculation becomes complicated.

BUT these constraints alone will not suffice to put an end to terrorism. There is now a great backwash of extreme fundamentalists into the West, the result of crackdowns in the Middle East and North Africa. They are gaining shelter, visas, and even political asylum. While some respect the laws of their host countries, some do not. There are fundamentalists who look upon the West as one more arena for the conduct of their *jihad*—against Western governments, their own governments, Israel, and the Jews.

If they are to be stopped, Western governments will have to show an absolute determination to keep their ground free of the violence that characterizes conflicts in the Middle East and North Africa. This can best be done by preventing the entry of more fundamentalist standard bearers; by regarding those already in the West as potentially violent; and by employing every legal means of surveillance against them.

Jewish communities also must grow alert to the danger. The prescient introduction to the *Anti-Semitism World Report* for 1992, published by the Institute of Jewish Affairs in London, determined that "Jewish security throughout the world is perhaps affected most seriously of all by Islamic fundamentalist groups." Yet at the same time, the report admitted that "this is an area about which there is more speculation than hard evidence," and that there is "an insufficient knowledge of the extent of [Muslim] anti-Jewish activity and propaganda" even in Britain and France.

The explanation for this failing is the obvious tendency to focus upon the heirs to the most destructive anti-Semitism of the past: neo-Nazis and the racist Right. Hence in the aftermath of the Buenos Aires bombings, there were many Argentine Jews who assumed that only the extreme Right could have been responsible for so heinous an assault.

This is a view of anti-Semitism that looks backward, not forward. For the greatest threat today comes not from neo-Nazis but from those fundamentalists of Islam who see in every Jew a political target in their war against Israel. Much more must be done by Jews to thwart them, including in-depth research, defensive measures, close cooperation with law-enforcement agencies, and dialogue with responsible Arab and Muslim organizations. If such activity is not made a priority, Buenos Aires may turn out to be only the first strike in a global *jihad* against the Jews.

Who can say whether Leonard Bernstein's success in one particular aspect of the musical world would have been greater had his focus been narrower. And with all those recordings with his name attached, it would be difficult, indeed, soon to forget him. But most of those recordings will be of music composed by *others*, not Bernstein. And perhaps it is time to wonder, not about the continued reputation of the man called "Lenny"—but about how we could ever have lost sight of the creative genius of Gustav Mahler, whose memory Mr. Teachout says was revived by Bernstein (though perhaps he has overlooked the devotion of Bruno Walter to Mahler). . .

DAVID R. ZUKERMAN
Bronx, New York

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

Terry Teachout is in error in calling Leonard Bernstein "the only American-born performer to have found a secure place in the first tier of such classical-music superstars as . . . [Maria] Callas," because Callas, too, was American-born. While records variously list December 2, 3, or 4 as her exact date of birth, Maria Kalogeropoulos was indisputedly born in 1923 at Flower Hospital on Fifth Avenue in New York City. . . .

HOWARD SCHRANZ
New York City

TERRY TEACHOUT writes:

I thank Stefan Bauer-Mengelberg, David R. Zukerman, and Howard Schranz for their interesting letters. Maria Callas was indeed born in New York City, a fact I knew (and have had pointed out to me by several other readers), but which slipped my mind for an obvious (if inexcusable) reason: she was American by birth only. Callas left the United States at the age of fourteen, and her career, tastes, and temperament were in every way the product of European training and experience.

Terrorism

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

Martin Kramer's contention ["The Jihad Against the Jews," October 1994] that the greatest threat to Jews today comes from Islamic fundamentalists is well-argued and persuasive. His call on Western governments to stem the influx of Islamic fundamentalists is equally well-taken. Yet how, I wonder, could the U.S. government actually go about this?

On a practical level, the prospect of screening would-be immigrants from the entire Muslim world and successfully filtering out the fundamentalists seems remote, to put it mildly.

On a constitutional level, I am not at all certain that extreme piety and devotion to their religion constitute sufficient cause for denying Muslims entry to the United States. And if it is argued that fundamentalists are closely linked to murder and terror—well (the *New York Times* will surely ask) shall we prevent Orthodox Jews from entering our country because of what Baruch Goldstein did in Hebron?

I conclude, therefore, in agreeing with Mr. Kramer that something urgently needs to be done, yet doubting whether anything effective can be done.

JAINE SHATTAN
Silver Spring, Maryland

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

It has long troubled me that the reasons given by terrorists for their actions are usually accepted at face value. . . . Actually, both psychology and history tell us that, generally, this is simply not so. . . . Killers, especially those whose acts are premeditated, kill because they want to and, on some important level, because they enjoy doing it. Unless there is proof to the contrary, comparing a murder to a war, a *jihad*, or anything else is, at best, a rationalization. In most acts of terrorism, there is no such proof.

No useful purpose is served by studying . . . Islam to understand the Buenos Aires bombers. Such a study, by the very fact of its being made, can only help legitimize the murderers, in whole or in part. . . .

STEPHEN E. ADLER
New York City

MARTIN KRAMER writes:

Jaine Shattan underestimates the means available to the U.S. government to protect its citizenry. U.S. agencies do collect information on fundamentalists who have threatened U.S. interests. The problem is that this information is

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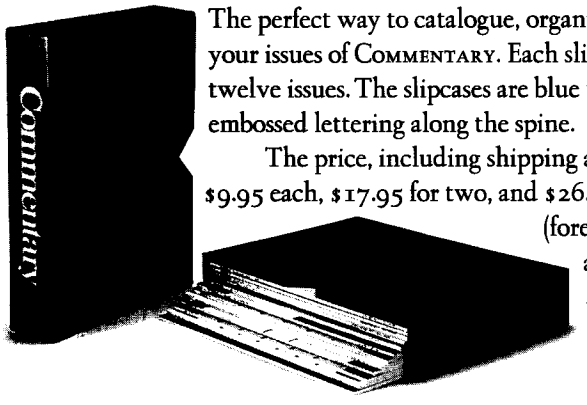

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not always available at the point on the globe where visa decisions are made. The government's own report on how visas were issued to Sheikh Omar Abdel-Rahman, alleged mastermind of the World Trade Center bombing, is a study in bureaucratic ineptitude. Since then, procedures have been tightened. While filtering is not foolproof, an open door is an open invitation to dangerous people whom no other country would admit, and some of whose faces we now have seen in Steven Emerson's compelling TV documentary, *Jihad in America.*

The purpose of such a filtering is not to bar people of piety, Muslim or Jewish. But if "extreme piety" takes the form of sanctifying political violence or threatening the U.S., evidence to that effect should be sufficient to exclude foreign fundamentalists from entry. Such evidence exists in abundance, certainly for the best-known activists of many movements. Where it is absent, information often can be supplied by Middle Eastern governments. It is not only practical to bring all this information to bear on visa decisions; it is essential if America is to enjoy an immunity from fundamentalist violence.

Stephen E. Adler's suggestion that my article "can only help legitimize the murderers" in Buenos Aires is a misreading, to say the least. His claim that such killing is pathological—done to satisfy some homicidal craving—exonerates the killers of any responsibility, on the grounds of insanity. But Buenos Aires was not the act of psychopaths in need of treatment. It was a calculated and cynical attempt to punish Israel by killing Jews. The ideology behind the choice of a Jewish target—a virulent anti-Semitism, imported into Islam—is far more dangerous than any individual psychosis.

There are governments which are soft on terror, and which would like us to believe, like Mr. Adler, that such killing is senseless. After all, no government can be expected to anticipate or deter acts of madness. But governments are perfectly capable of combating and deterring political violence, which the Buenos Aires bombing most certainly was. If terrorists are not held fully accountable for their actions, and governments for their inaction, then truly the victims will have died in vain—and their number will surely multiply.

Learning Math

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

David Guaspari, in his review of *Overcoming Math Anxiety* by Sheila Tobias [Books in Review, October 1994], is of course right to note that Tobias errs in describing Plato's *Republic* as "Socrates' best-known treatise on government" and in identifying it as his *Dialogue*, but he goes overboard in characterizing this error as "a serious cultural failing" and a "howler."

Unless, that is, he is prepared to make the same criticism of Allan Bloom's analysis. At the very outset of the interpretive essay accompanying his translation of the *Republic*, Bloom writes: "The *Republic* is the true *Apology* of Socrates, for only in the *Republic* does he give an adequate treatment of the theme which was forced on him by Athens's accusation against him."

The context of Tobias's reference is a discussion of the Socratic method, suggesting that, properly understood, it provides a model for teaching mathematics. No more than Bloom does she commit a cultural trespass of any kind, let alone a howler, in regarding Plato's *Republic* as a rendering of the teachings of Socrates.

SANFORD LAKOFF
University of California
San Diego, California

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

David Guaspari's review of the latest version of the great Sheila Tobias ripoff has, at last, rectified for me the wrongs perpetrated by this artist of the trendy and shallow. I suffered the wave of enthusiasm that Tobias engendered at Cornell in the wake of the 60's disasters, and was at that point a tiny and totally ostracized voice of dissent. Thank you.

NADINE F. GEORGE
Gambier, Ohio

DAVID GUASPARI writes:

My clucking over Sheila Tobias's factual howlers—and "howler" is exactly right—was a rhetorical way of dismissing her book's cultural pretensions. Sanford Lakoff says that the specific passage I dismissed, despite its warts, made an important point. Doing so required him to perform an act of charity, by elevating a few banal paragraphs to "a discussion of the Socratic method" and attributing to them the significance they might have had if he or Allan Bloom had rewritten them.

Let me finish by thanking Nadine F. George for her letter.